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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 224 (2016) 475 – 482

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

6th International Research Symposium in Service Management, IRSSM-6 2015, 11-15 August  
2015, UiTM Sarawak, Kuching, Malaysia

# Organizing Spheres of Privacy in the Hospitality Industry

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## Abstract

Increasingly, resort guests are asked to evaluate their resort experience based on the experience of privacy. This paper analyses how two different resorts organize spheres of privacy in different activities. It was found in the analysis that resort personnel redesign the designed servicescape in order to construct a livable/workable space for the guests. The study showed that the construction of the workable “sphere of privacy” follows similar patterns when an “isolated” privacy in terms of room and pool is requested, when an “intimate” private dinner is requested, and when private “day at the beach” is requested. The concept “organizing a sphere of privacy” is suggested to understand and account for the dual construction of privacy at resorts. The dual construction refers to the workable space accounted for in terms of broader organizational service perspectives like delivering service in an expedient manner, ensuring that all the different services of the resort can both be accessed and executed. The literature shows that guests also adapt, change, and negotiate the designed servicescape. It is argued that in order to account for both the organizations’ change and negotiation of the servicescape, as well as guest manipulation, resistance to and change of the servicescape demands a more fluid concept for these processes.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Universiti Teknologi MARA Sarawak

**Keywords:** organizing; privacy; heterotopia; tourism; service management

## 1. Introduction

This paper seeks to analyze and develop a theory about how privacy is organized in resorts. Privacy in terms of data protection, consumer data, and surveillance is widely discussed both inside service management and in the broader discussions about the internet. However, privacy as something that are organized, setup and a service sold to guests have only received scarce attention in the academic literature. The lack of academic service management

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theories, stand in sharp contrast to both public discussions, complaints from guests at resorts, but also to evaluations at resorts at for instance trip advisor. In this paper the employees and managements actual organizing of privacy is at the centre of analysis.

The boundary between what is considered private and public in resorts, tourist areas and airports has in many countries and regions from time to time sparked fears public discussions. In Thailand an allegedly Chinese woman who dried her bra and underpants on the chairs in a low cost terminal sparked the latest viral discussion. Judge from the public available pictures – the terminal was almost empty, nobody but the Chinese woman was seated in close proximity to the “offense act”. Despite this, the pictures sparked a strong condemnation of especially Chinese tourists who it was claimed consistently violated norms of good behaviour and in particular other guest’s privacy.

Another example of clashes over privacy could be seen in a resort with 200 rooms. The mainly Scandinavian guests consistently complained that the Korean Honeymooners violated their private lunch at the beach restaurant, when the Korean couples were taken the obligatory selfie-pictures needed for presentation to friends and family when the honeymoon was over.

The same focus on privacy can be found in guest evaluation of resorts here taken from Tubkaak resort: “The resort is very isolated, which is lovely to get away from the hordes of tourists in the Krabi area” (guest evaluation from trip advisor. Italics added by author).

All 3 of the examples are taken from service areas in, which specific services are organized by professionals. It is common that the professionals do not appear in relation to any of the discussions by the guests and customers. The professional service organization is despite the open conflicts and discussions are almost invisible. Further, to this all the incidence mentioned are happening in areas with other guests.

The Tubkaak evaluations most directly illustrate this, with the reference to avoiding the “hoards”, “White sands and no people” – but admitted “this is because of the way the nature was setup”. The setting up of “nature” takes a very large amount of both planning and design, but also very large amount of resources to continuously make it look like “nature”.

The Korean Honeymoon selfies illustrate another aspect of this. Selfies are also very common in Scandinavia, and it is the authors claim that at any street café in a major Scandinavian city selfies are taken constantly, to be in open air, close to the sea in your hometown for some reason do not spark the same ‘invasion of privacy’ as when the picture is taken inside a closed resort. Inside the resort privacy seems to be part of the package and therefore can’t be violated.

The low cost airport example might illustrate a normative clash between cultures. However, this potential clash in normative culture might be a bit paradoxical given that most low cost airports are extremely noisy, with children crying and running around, smells from food and snacks eaten in the waiting area, people laughing loudly, constant announcements from loudspeakers. You could claim that the average low cost airport in Asia increasingly looks like, and are organized as previous times train stations, which more looked like a market place, mall, and departure hall. A space where you can ask why you in the first place expect a normative privacy and behaviour in accordance with this.

## **2. Privacy**

Privacy is a heavily discussed issue when it comes to the Internet, protection of guest and consumer data etc. However, the discussion of privacy related to providing other kind of service seems to be very limited. However, in hospitality the discussion has started almost 100 years ago shortly after vacations and breaks from the city life became possible not only for the upper classes, but also the broader middle class in for instance United States. Sterngass (2001) shows in his book “first resorts: pursuing pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, and Coney Island that the first resorts were linked in a culture of see-and-be-seen voyeurism. However, these places later started to change dramatically in order to both separate the classes, but also increasingly to create a sense of privacy and being away from the crowds. These historically developments ask the question of what this privacy actually means, and what kind of privacy service the guests are expecting and the venues are actually selling.

In the historical literature (Aries & Duby, 1994, 1993, 1993a) it is largely shown that at least western European countries concept and understanding of private life changes dramatically over the centuries. Further, it is not before the Renaissance we can start see the shaping of modern forms of privacy. Privacy in the modern western sense of

the term seems to have demanded radically changes to the way Tudor England build and refurbished their upper class houses (Orlin, 2008). Before the changes even the upper class and powerful seem devoid of actual privacy, at the same time as it to a large extent seem to have been a dangerous thing. At the same time privacy does not seem to be a universal similar phenomenon if we compare the western concept of privacy with the historical Chinese concepts of privacy as it develops over the centuries (McDougall & Hansson, 2002). What privacy means those seem to be constructed socially in very different ways, all the historical concepts of privacy does however, seem to include at some stage an idea of privacy as precious for the one who have it, at the same time as it is something which is restricted to the privileged, but privacy seems to be originally more concerned about spatial relations, than just social and human relations. When the Western and the Chinese concept of privacy is compared they do share one similarity, for both of them is produced and ensured through work of other people (servants).

In the more psychological and environmental related literature privacy is normally considered a multidimensional concept that have different types of privacy (Pedersen, 1979): isolation, solitude, intimacy with family, intimacy with friends, and anonymity. Inside these types of privacy there seems to be several different approaches to defining and thereby researching privacy and what it is (Newell, 1995).

Given this large amount of very different perspectives on privacy, that historically studies shows that privacy and the existence of privacy differ with culture and times, and that privacy is a service which in tourism and vacations are sought out and valued already in the early tourism industry. The approach in this study to privacy is to ask the question what kind of privacy is provided and how by the service organization and what kind of privacy are valued by the guests.

In the approach to the privacy service, a special focus will be on its socio-spatial nature as almost all studies contains the spatial element as a vital element in experiencing and producing privacy.

### 3. Research methodology

The research data for this paper was gathered as part of a larger project looking at the relationship between organizing and the spatial dimensions of service organizations like Hotels and Malls. In the case applied in this research article is almost exclusively taken from the “Boutique Resort” Tubkaak Kaek.

The research was conducted on site using at ethnographic and semi structured interviews with the owner, General Manager, restaurant manager and different service employees. Direct observation was conducted of guest and staff activities in the “public area”. Finally, all reviews (like trip advisor) and other public available data has been used in the analysis presented in this article.

The data has been analyzed by using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory methodology has historically been split between the two original founders (see for instance Heath & Cowley, 2004). The approach taken here does rely more on the Corbin & Strauss approach, in which the analyst simultaneously will move between a 1st order coding of arenas, actants, relations/networks/practices, 2nd order coding/analysis in the form of memo writing and conceptualization. Many of the technical steps and establishment of categories is however, taken from in particular Glaser (1978).

The approach does, however, differ from both approaches that I apply 3 sensitizing categories (Dopping, 1998). These categories are actants (Latour, 2005), networks, relation and practices (Strauss, 1993) and Arenas (Strauss, 1993; Latour, 2013<sup>1</sup>). The category of “actants” asks the question to the date who or what is performing certain activities / stabilities. The category of “arenas” asks how things are localized and given extension, and in particular how localities and levels are related to each other. The category of “network, relation, and practice” asks how things move; make relations, and works in between different actants and networks. This approach to analyzing data does make it possible to analyze the same set of data through different lenses and create cross-paradigmatic incident conceptualization (Dopping & Morsing, 1998), in particular in the second order re-conceptualization and description of incidents and cases.

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<sup>1</sup> Latour 2013 does NOT use arena as a concept in his Inquiry into modes of existence. However, his question about how things are related and made to exist in places is here interpreted as a way of asking to “arenas” extension, sizes and times.

#### 4. Dual organizing spheres of privacy and other findings

Privacy takes many forms and it is at present a vague defined term. However, for the service organization statements like:

“A resort that was away from all the *noise and crowd*, but still not too far away.” Guest evaluation from trip advisor.

Seems to be a guideline for the design of the Hotel resort. The guideline is 1. To keep the crowd away, and 2. Manage the noise that this crowd makes. Privacy in the Hotel resort seems in practice to be defined in relation to the crowd. It is the distance and the isolation from “the crowd” which seems to become a defining characteristic. This relation seems to follow Hetherington’s (1997) definition of heterotopia where in our case the private space and experience come in to existence in the relationship between the space of the crowd and the space of privacy that the Hotel guest experience. This relation is reflected in the customers review “but still not too far away”. In order for the Hotel to be experienced as private the noise and the crowd must be in a reasonable distance. From a service management perspective that could lead us to the understanding that privacy as a service is simply a matter of location towards the crowd. However, any Hotel resort in order to be profitable must have a reasonable high occupancy rate. That means there must be quite a few other guests around. The relation to other guests can be seen in the continuation of the above guest review:

“.... First things first, the beach this resort is located is just plain amazing. There was not a soul in sight when we stepped out. White sands and no people, what could we ask for. The resort is beautiful and even though it is a large resort with many rooms, it never felt overcrowded. This was because of the way nature was set up here. Wherever you look, there is greenery and no people. Pure paradise on earth.” (Guest evaluation from trip advisor. Italics added by author – According to the Resort it was fully booked in the mentioned period).

The first impression of the quote and many other guest evaluations is that resort de facto is deserted. There are no “people” nor “souls” insight. The paradox is that in the same paragraph the reviewer at the same time states: “it never felt overcrowded”. The important point is that the guest reviewer recognized that in fact there are many other guests, but that they never got her to “feel” that the place was overcrowded. For almost all the reviewers this difference between the “crowd” and the other guests are made. The other guests are for some reason invisible and can ignored in the guest experience. During the observation at the resort it was noticed that the guests that actually acknowledge each other’s existence and interacted almost all seems to know each other from before they arrived to the Hotel resort. It is in itself an analysis of relevance which kind of guests are defined as the “noisy crowd” and which can blend in and become invisible for each other. How the guest acknowledges other guests as invisible guests and in practice differentiate the guest from a visible “noisy crowd” is a study in itself. In this article it is sufficient to conclude that guest that goes to a Hotel Resort for privacy creates a heterotopian space in which other guests are invisible and as such part of the private space and in particular different from the “noisy crowd”.

The reviews and the interviews with staff revealed that the staff goes to great length to construct this experience of privacy. The interview and the observations further revealed that continued “physical construction” of the resort contained a continued building of service areas that are made “invisible” for the guest. In order to ensure the privacy experience the staffs working areas is build in the outer parameters of the resort. If one imagine the resort as rectangle one side will be open towards the sea, in each corner that are close to the sea there is build two semi open air restaurants/bars, in the two other corners we find the reception area and service and staff building. The later service and staff building is build in such a way that from outside the resort it will not be recognized as part of the resort, and from inside the resort it is almost invisible. Along the 3 sides, which do not relate to the beach and sea are hidden “transport ways” in which staff and relevant equipment, goods and grocery can be transported. The

continued maintenance and structuring of the Hotel Resort has a style organizing that deliberately hides the necessary service work<sup>2</sup>.

This deliberately physical constructed character of the work processes at the Hotel Resort seems to be a vital element in understanding and interpreting the constructed sphere of privacy constructed (see also Burrell, 2013). In the present case we observe that “to organize means building up the *dual structure, material and human*, of the undertaking” (Fayol, 1949, p5, My underlining). In the interviews with the managers at the Hotel Resort they consistently stressed that it was important that the staff applied the hidden transport ways and entrances and that they in general only was in the guest areas when they had a specific purpose. Even when they had a specific purpose they could not bring a “wagon” or a golf cart – both of which are very common in both larger and smaller Resorts and Hotels in Thailand. Everything was literally carried by hand in to the area. This include guest luggage, cleaning material, tools and paints for simple maintenance, flower decorations etc. which had to be carried to and from the reception area. The transport ways and four corners those automatically, become the hidden work area where everything is prepared, moved fast, and transported easily on a paved “road”.

#### 4.1. Invisible work and service

The important aspect here is that the spheres of guest private space exist in an intimate relation to the work areas without which the private guest sphere seems to be private or free of visible work. The otherness of the noisy crowd is those not only someone outside of the resort, but it is also inside the resort, where the work and the staff represent the crowd and the potential noise (see below). The privacy experience is those supported by that guest when they walk around or arrive to the Hotel / Resort cannot see the staff – part of the work of the staff is to make themselves and their work invisible. The invisibility of staff and work can be illustrated with the below examples.

Traditionally most Hotel / Resorts in Thailand have a visible employee and as a minimum a cooler for ice cream and water / soft drinks close to the beach area where guest are either swimming in the sea or sunbathing. In many places this makes it easy for guests to order whenever they want, but the visible location also makes it easy for the employees to directly observe the guests. The management at Tubkak Kaek changed this set-up because their staff and the cooler could be seen when the guest were at the beach and when they were swimming in the sea, for them the employees and the coolers visibility destroys the experience of privacy and makes the Hotel/resorts beach look like it carries street vendors, which off course represent a space of the crowd and noise. The removal of the cooler and the employee of course doesn't mean that the service disappeared. Instead new location for employees was found. Locations that provides the employees with the opportunity to observe the guests without being seen by the guests. The demand for providing timely service to guest does however increase dramatically with this organization. To choose to provide the service or make the service available for the guest becomes a matter of interpreting when the guest wants service and when they don't want. Non-verbal signs like looking around becomes signs for interpretation if the employees should make themselves available for providing service. In the present case and judging from the reviews the staff at this resort has developed that skill to a significant degree. However, it should also be noticed that the experience of privacy at the resort becomes even more dependent on an extensive observation of what the guest is doing at all time.

The other example can be observed on the picture as in Figure 1. The picture part of the standard set-up at the beach. Observing the picture the first thing, which should be fairly obvious is that the idea of privacy as a deserted beach with no people under normal circumstances would be an illusion. The space between the sunbathing stations is about 3 meters, behind the sunbathing stations fairly close by but in the shadow during the day we can observe several benches and chairs, as well as a designated smoking area.

The sunbathing stations can be moved closer and further away from the sea depending on the tide and the guest immediate wishes. Since the service staff is not from the beach observable most guest would on the first day try to

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<sup>2</sup> The resort only has one place where the transport way is visible. When the guest arrives they will have to walk over a wooden bridge, which goes over the transport way for staff. However, at this small visibility point it is not possible to see if the “road belongs to the resort or is just an other road beside the main road.

move the sunbathing station by themselves. However, apparently like out of nowhere one to two service staff will arrive and relocate the sunbathing station to the guests suggested choice. On the second day most guest has discovered that whenever the raise and gather there towels or other private property the employees will arrive and relocate the sunbathing station or if the guests are leaving the beach quickly clean and puff the two madras's back to the original set-up after which they disappear.

What both examples illustrate is the amount of service work, which will be kept invisible for the guest. It will only be displayed or made available when it is interpreted that the guests wants immediate service.



Fig. 1. The standard set-up at the beach.

#### 4.2. Management of noise

One of the key aspects of the crowd is the noise as it can be seen from the quotations offered is the noise of the crowd – or as it is argued above employees as part of the crowd. The Hotel Resort do get a lot of echo when there is no wind in the area due to that it is located below a large mount. This means that noise made in the periphery of the resort will spread through the resort fairly fast and give an experience as if somebody is working or talking very close by.

That noise is an issue can be interpreted from the guest evaluations where some of the very few complaints is noise originating from the staff or nearby constructions. It is again interesting that noise from other guests or their children only rarely is mentioned.

In order to handle the noise issue the organization has implemented work rules and practice that employees in general don't talk over radios, these are only applied for very short messages, they don't talk to each other when they move around in the transport area in the morning, where the echo effect under normal circumstances is very large. Further to this the maintenance work is partly planned in relation to how noisy it would be. The noisy maintenance work is normally executed in the early afternoon where the sea breeze tends to silence the noise from maintenance work and heavier transportation.

The central point here is that the organization of work as it is part of the otherness and difference to privacy needs to be silenced and unnoticed.

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1. Heterotopia and social space

Hetherington (1996) redefines and specify the original Foucault term of Heterotopia as

“Sites of alternate ordering and suggest (ed) that they were places of Otherness, whose otherness was established by their incongruous condition. That incongruity emerges through the relationship of difference



with other sites such that their presence either provides an unsettling of spatial relations or an alternative representation of spatial relations” (Hetherington, 1996, p. 51).

Approaching the findings from the study of the Hotel Resort from a perspective of heterotopia we gain several advantages. First of all Hetherington’s definition of Utopia has the advantage of stressing the actual ordering as a verb of the specific place. By focusing on the ordering process we can ask the data and the interpretations to how this ordering is managed by the organization both social-spatial but also in terms of actual interventions into the way possible to ask in what this otherness consist, in our case who and what is the crowd and the noise. Thirdly, the serviced space is obviously never fixed; it is reproduced remade and constantly modified in the relations between the service activities and the guest activities.

The “sphere of privacy” which a Hotel Resort can construct and try to order in these terms becomes both a very material arena, which is constantly separated by the service management practice of separating a work arena from guest activities. The concept of Heterotopia does help to describe the activity of separation, however the sphere of privacy at the same time becomes a physical and social space in which the “the crowd and noise” of work and people can be ignored, or do not feature to any significant degree for the guests. The concept of heterotopia those need the expansion which can be gained from the concept of arenas, where just like in a circus the circus arena is physical separated from the arena of spectators, and just as the circus arenas will only exist as long as coordinated work is done to construct the arenas, so will the sphere of privacy only exist as long as the service management practices construction of physical invisibility and silence is reproduced.

From a service management perspective this sphere of privacy is highly labour intensive, and may even as in the resort used as a case make the work more manual and to some degree inefficient. Inefficient because certain tools, techniques and surveillance can only be applied in very limited ways. Service management wise we see that in order to get the deserted beach to function a larger number of employees must be applied to constantly oversee and interpret the guests potential intentions based on soft bodily signs and movements.

## 6. Conclusions and further research

This first analysis is only based on a single case and therefore our ability to generalize the findings is off course limited. However, the purpose of the study was more focused on developing concepts that can be applied to understand and further develop our understanding of service management in Hotel Resorts.

The concept of spheres of privacy expands the concept of heterotopia and ensures that the materiality of the arenas are included. Further, the concept is a starting point for explaining how guests consume and experience privacy. It starts to explain how guests can experience privacy when they are both surrounded by large amount of other guests, and at the same time are closely monitored in order for the organization to be able to provide its services.

The concept of invisibility and invisible work creates an awareness of the necessary work and how to manage this work is a necessary condition for delivering the service of the Hotel Resort. The concept certainly needs further elaboration in order to be useful for managers and employees in their daily work. Further to this the concept needs exploration of which invisible work practices that more effectively increase the experience of privacy. Noise management is only to a limited degree conceptualized in this article. It needs further elaboration to more clearly understand what creates the perceived difference between the noisy crowd outside and the noise of all the gathered privacy seeking guests.

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